

GANNETT TAKES OVER WILMINGTON PAPERS

**New Publisher Promises Courage
of Ex-Owner, Du Pont Company,
With Which Staff Quarreled**

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WILMINGTON, Del., Feb. 4.—The Gannett Company, which already owned more newspapers than any other publishing group in the country, took formal control this weekend of the only two newspapers in Delaware with statewide circulation.

This week, the E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Company sold Gannett The Wilmington Morning News and The Evening Journal for \$60 million.

While the price was far from the highest ever paid for an American newspaper, the purchase gave Gannett the only papers in Delaware that are circulated statewide. The papers have no serious competition for local newspaper advertising and there is no commercial television station here.

The purchase also gave Gannett a total of 75 papers, the largest number owned by a single chain in the country. The combined daily circulation of the papers is about 140,000 and the total circulation of its Saturday and Sunday editions is about 200,000.

Donnelly Named Publisher

Yesterday, Gannett appointed Brian J. Donnelly, 44 years old, the former publisher of Gannett's two newspapers in Binghamton, N.Y., as publisher of the News-Journal Company here. Mr. Donnelly and other Gannett officials said in interviews here that the papers would cover objectively and impartially the Du Pont Company and family, which have pervasive economic and political power in the state.

Several years ago, editors and reporters of the two papers sometimes quarreled with the Du Pont corporate management over alleged interference in editorial decisions and policies.

"Those were old days," said one Gannett official. Mr. Donnelly added, "We will cover Du Pont in Wilmington the same way we cover I.B.M. in Binghamton or Eastman Kodak in Rochester," the chain's home base in New York State where it operates The Democrat and Chronicle and The Times-Union.

Andrew Fisher, who recently resigned as publisher and president of the two papers but will remain for an indefinite period as a consultant, said that in the 8 months he has been in charge here, there was "no instance of pressure" from Du Pont on the papers' policies.

"We have been doing a fair, square, clean job on Du Pont," Mr. Fischer said.

Assurance on Staff Size

Allen H. Neuharth, president of Gannett, said after the officials visited each department of the papers yesterday that he had assured the company's 600 employees that there were no plans to change the size of the editorial, production or business staffs. He said he expected the papers' profits, which were about \$2 million last year, to continue to rise.

Gannett's decision to buy the Wilmington papers was made two weeks ago, the culmination of a somewhat unusual procedure for the sale of newspapers in this country.

The Du Pont Company, which acquired direct control of the papers last year when it got Federal approval to merge with one of its subsidiary holding companies, Christiana Securities, set rare rules for prospective buyers. Du Pont insisted on a deposit of \$200,000 for the right to examine the newspaper company prospectus and an additional \$200,000 to inspect the physical plant.

Several possible buyers, including The New York Times Company, which had been tentatively interested in the Wilmington offer, did not submit the deposits. Gannett's bid of \$60 million was the highest received by Du Pont, more than the undisclosed amount offered by the second highest bidder, the Hearst Corporation, and the \$55 million reportedly offered by the third highest, The Washington Post Company.

Some reporters and editors on the two papers had hoped Du Pont would sell to The Washington Post. But after the Gannett executives spoke to employees at the downtown offices of the papers, there was no noticeable unrest or gloom left in their wake.

"They haven't said anything bad so far, and that's good," said one man in the newsroom.

No Pink Slips Monday

One Gannett official, answering questions from employees, said there would be "no pink slips Monday unless they were already in the works" before the Gannett takeover. Mr. Neuharth said he was pleased with the "profitability" of the papers, adding, "We don't have any plans for reducing or adding to the work force. These people here know what they're doing."

The acquisition gave Gannett newspapers in 29 states plus one on Guam. The purchase of another, on St. Thomas, the United States Virgin Islands, is expected.

The next chains to Gannett in numbers of papers owned are Knight-Ridder, which owns 32 papers, and the Newhouse Company, which has 29. Hearst, once the giant of the business, now has eight papers. In terms of circulation, Gannett's 3 million is surpassed only by Knight-Ridder, 3.5 million; Newhouse, 3.3 million; and the Chicago Tribune Company, 3.1 million.